

**UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
MERIT SYSTEMS PROTECTION BOARD**

JEFFREY ROWSER,
Appellant,

DOCKET NUMBER
AT-844E-20-0793-I-1

v.

OFFICE OF PERSONNEL
MANAGEMENT,
Agency.

DATE: July 20, 2023

THIS FINAL ORDER IS NONPRECEDENTIAL¹

Derrick Mason, Birmingham, Alabama, for the appellant.

Jo Bell, Washington, D.C., for the agency.

BEFORE

Cathy A. Harris, Vice Chairman
Raymond A. Limon, Member

FINAL ORDER

¶1 The agency, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), has filed a petition for review of the initial decision, which reversed its decision denying the appellant's application for disability retirement benefits. On petition for review, OPM argues that the administrative judge gave insufficient probative

¹ A nonprecedential order is one that the Board has determined does not add significantly to the body of MSPB case law. Parties may cite nonprecedential orders, but such orders have no precedential value; the Board and administrative judges are not required to follow or distinguish them in any future decisions. In contrast, a precedential decision issued as an Opinion and Order has been identified by the Board as significantly contributing to the Board's case law. See [5 C.F.R. § 1201.117\(c\)](#).

weight to the fact that the appellant participated in local politics and ran for political office during the period that he alleged he was disabled, and therefore erroneously concluded that the appellant met the criteria for disability retirement benefits. Generally, we grant petitions such as this one only in the following circumstances: the initial decision contains erroneous findings of material fact; the initial decision is based on an erroneous interpretation of statute or regulation or the erroneous application of the law to the facts of the case; the administrative judge's rulings during either the course of the appeal or the initial decision were not consistent with required procedures or involved an abuse of discretion, and the resulting error affected the outcome of the case; or new and material evidence or legal argument is available that, despite the petitioner's due diligence, was not available when the record closed. Title 5 of the Code of Federal Regulations, section 1201.115 ([5 C.F.R. § 1201.115](#)). After fully considering the filings in this appeal, we conclude that the petitioner has not established any basis under section 1201.115 for granting the petition for review.

¶2 We find that there is no merit to OPM's argument on review. The administrative judge carefully considered and rejected OPM's argument that the appellant's decision to apply for disability retirement was motivated by his political ambitions, concluding that even though the appellant had expressed aspirational interest in political office, that fact did not detract from the medical records and other subjective evidence, which reflected a clear desire by the appellant to continue his service with the agency up until the final workplace incident that triggered his post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in January 2019. Initial Appeal File (IAF), Tab 13, Initial Decision (ID) at 13-14.

¶3 Additionally, none of the specific medical records OPM points to on review undermine this conclusion. *See* Petition for Review (PFR) File, Tab 1 at 7. Although the records reflect that the appellant expressed an interest in holding political office at various times during the period from September 2017 through March 2019, these desires were "aspirational" as the administrative judge

indicated, in the sense that the appellant ran for a city council seat but was unsuccessful in his endeavor, and despite the fact that he has been on leave from the agency since April 2019, *see* IAF, Tab 8 at 38, there is nothing in the record indicating that he is occupying any political office, *see* ID at 14.

¶4 Further, in response to OPM’s argument, the appellant notes that his desire to get involved in his community and pursue political office was undertaken in an effort to cope with his PTSD symptoms, on the advice of his therapist. PFR File, Tab 3 at 4. This assertion is consistent with the testimony the appellant provided at the hearing in response to OPM’s questions on this point, wherein the appellant noted that during a discussion with his therapist concerning potentially leaving the agency due to his conditions, his therapist expressed concern about the appellant “just sit[ting] at home” post-retirement, and the effect that might have on his conditions. IAF, Tab 12, Hearing Compact Disc (HCD) (testimony of the appellant); *see* IAF, Tab 7 at 4; ID at 9-10. In response to these concerns and his therapist’s suggestion that he find a hobby, the appellant discussed his passions for helping people and proposed serving in political office as a hobby that would keep his mind occupied, get him involved in his local community, and help him work through his PTSD symptoms. HCD (testimony of the appellant). The appellant explained that political engagement helped alleviate some of his PTSD symptoms by allowing him to help people, and that he could “deal with people for limited amounts of time” through community engagement or in elected political office. HCD (testimony of the appellant).

¶5 Accordingly, the administrative judge appropriately considered the fact that the appellant expressed interest in participating in political office and determined that this fact did not undermine her conclusion that his disabilities were nevertheless inconsistent with working in his particular position, in his particular work environment, with which we agree. *See* ID at 12, 14. Consequently, we find no error in the administrative judge’s finding that the appellant proved that he is unable to render useful and efficient service in his particular work setting.

See Craig v. Office of Personnel Management, [92 M.S.P.R. 449](#), ¶ 13 (2002) (finding that the appellant's medical condition, including PTSD, was incompatible with useful and efficient service in her Unit Secretary position because she testified that her PTSD symptoms were exacerbated in the penitentiary setting and her mental health professional confirmed that the appellant's condition was "extremely environmentally sensitive"). Therefore, we DENY the petition for review and AFFIRM the initial decision, which is now the Board's final decision. [5 C.F.R. § 1201.113\(b\)](#).

ORDER

¶6 We ORDER OPM to grant the appellant disability retirement benefits. OPM must complete this action no later than 20 days after the date of this decision.

¶7 We also ORDER OPM to tell the appellant promptly in writing when it believes it has fully carried out the Board's Order and of the actions it has taken to carry out the Board's Order. We ORDER the appellant to provide all necessary information OPM requests to help it carry out the Board's Order. The appellant, if not notified, should ask OPM about its progress. *See* [5 C.F.R. § 1201.181\(b\)](#).

¶8 No later than 30 days after OPM tells the appellant it has fully carried out the Board's Order, the appellant may file a petition for enforcement with the office that issued the initial decision on this appeal if the appellant believes that OPM did not fully carry out the Board's Order. The petition should contain specific reasons why the appellant believes OPM has not fully carried out the Board's Order, and should include the dates and results of any communications with OPM. *See* [5 C.F.R. § 1201.182\(a\)](#).

**NOTICE TO THE APPELLANT REGARDING
YOUR RIGHT TO REQUEST
ATTORNEY FEES AND COSTS**

You may be entitled to be paid by the agency for your reasonable attorney fees and costs. To be paid, you must meet the requirements set out at Title 5 of the United States Code (5 U.S.C.), sections 7701(g), 1221(g), or 1214(g). The regulations may be found at [5 C.F.R. §§ 1201.201](#), 1201.202, and 1201.203. If you believe you meet these requirements, you must file a motion for attorney fees and costs **WITHIN 60 CALENDAR DAYS OF THE DATE OF THIS DECISION**. You must file your motion for attorney fees and costs with the office that issued the initial decision on your appeal.

NOTICE OF APPEAL RIGHTS²

You may obtain review of this final decision. [5 U.S.C. § 7703](#)(a)(1). By statute, the nature of your claims determines the time limit for seeking such review and the appropriate forum with which to file. [5 U.S.C. § 7703](#)(b). Although we offer the following summary of available appeal rights, the Merit Systems Protection Board does not provide legal advice on which option is most appropriate for your situation and the rights described below do not represent a statement of how courts will rule regarding which cases fall within their jurisdiction. If you wish to seek review of this final decision, you should immediately review the law applicable to your claims and carefully follow all filing time limits and requirements. Failure to file within the applicable time limit may result in the dismissal of your case by your chosen forum.

Please read carefully each of the three main possible choices of review below to decide which one applies to your particular case. If you have questions

² Since the issuance of the initial decision in this matter, the Board may have updated the notice of review rights included in final decisions. As indicated in the notice, the Board cannot advise which option is most appropriate in any matter.

about whether a particular forum is the appropriate one to review your case, you should contact that forum for more information.

(1) Judicial review in general. As a general rule, an appellant seeking judicial review of a final Board order must file a petition for review with the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit, which must be received by the court within **60 calendar days** of the date of issuance of this decision. [5 U.S.C. § 7703\(b\)\(1\)\(A\).](#)

If you submit a petition for review to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit, you must submit your petition to the court at the following address:

U.S. Court of Appeals
for the Federal Circuit
717 Madison Place, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20439

Additional information about the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit is available at the court's website, www.cafc.uscourts.gov. Of particular relevance is the court's "Guide for Pro Se Petitioners and Appellants," which is contained within the court's Rules of Practice, and Forms 5, 6, 10, and 11.

If you are interested in securing pro bono representation for an appeal to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit, you may visit our website at <http://www.mspb.gov/probono> for information regarding pro bono representation for Merit Systems Protection Board appellants before the Federal Circuit. The Board neither endorses the services provided by any attorney nor warrants that any attorney will accept representation in a given case.

(2) Judicial or EEOC review of cases involving a claim of discrimination. This option applies to you only if you have claimed that you were affected by an action that is appealable to the Board and that such action was based, in whole or in part, on unlawful discrimination. If so, you may obtain

judicial review of this decision—including a disposition of your discrimination claims—by filing a civil action with an appropriate U.S. district court (*not* the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit), within **30 calendar days** after you receive this decision. [5 U.S.C. § 7703](#)(b)(2); *see Perry v. Merit Systems Protection Board*, [582 U.S. 420](#) (2017). If you have a representative in this case, and your representative receives this decision before you do, then you must file with the district court no later than **30 calendar days** after your representative receives this decision. If the action involves a claim of discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, or a disabling condition, you may be entitled to representation by a court-appointed lawyer and to waiver of any requirement of prepayment of fees, costs, or other security. *See* [42 U.S.C. § 2000e-5](#)(f) and [29 U.S.C. § 794a](#).

Contact information for U.S. district courts can be found at their respective websites, which can be accessed through the link below:

http://www.uscourts.gov/Court_Locator/CourtWebsites.aspx.

Alternatively, you may request review by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) of your discrimination claims only, excluding all other issues. [5 U.S.C. § 7702](#)(b)(1). You must file any such request with the EEOC's Office of Federal Operations within **30 calendar days** after you receive this decision. [5 U.S.C. § 7702](#)(b)(1). If you have a representative in this case, and your representative receives this decision before you do, then you must file with the EEOC no later than **30 calendar days** after your representative receives this decision.

If you submit a request for review to the EEOC by regular U.S. mail, the address of the EEOC is:

Office of Federal Operations
Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
P.O. Box 77960
Washington, D.C. 20013

If you submit a request for review to the EEOC via commercial delivery or by a method requiring a signature, it must be addressed to:

Office of Federal Operations
Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
131 M Street, N.E.
Suite 5SW12G
Washington, D.C. 20507

(3) Judicial review pursuant to the Whistleblower Protection Enhancement Act of 2012. This option applies to you only if you have raised claims of reprisal for whistleblowing disclosures under [5 U.S.C. § 2302](#)(b)(8) or other protected activities listed in [5 U.S.C. § 2302](#)(b)(9)(A)(i), (B), (C), or (D). If so, and your judicial petition for review “raises no challenge to the Board’s disposition of allegations of a prohibited personnel practice described in section 2302(b) other than practices described in section 2302(b)(8), or 2302(b)(9)(A)(i), (B), (C), or (D),” then you may file a petition for judicial review either with the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit or any court of appeals of competent jurisdiction.³ The court of appeals must receive your petition for review within **60 days** of the date of issuance of this decision. [5 U.S.C. § 7703](#)(b)(1)(B).

If you submit a petition for judicial review to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit, you must submit your petition to the court at the following address:

³ The original statutory provision that provided for judicial review of certain whistleblower claims by any court of appeals of competent jurisdiction expired on December 27, 2017. The All Circuit Review Act, signed into law by the President on July 7, 2018, permanently allows appellants to file petitions for judicial review of MSPB decisions in certain whistleblower reprisal cases with the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit or any other circuit court of appeals of competent jurisdiction. The All Circuit Review Act is retroactive to November 26, 2017. Pub. L. No. 115-195, 132 Stat. 1510.

U.S. Court of Appeals
for the Federal Circuit
717 Madison Place, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20439

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http://www.uscourts.gov/Court_Locator/CourtWebsites.aspx.

FOR THE BOARD:

/s/ for

Jennifer Everling
Acting Clerk of the Board

Washington, D.C.